

KENYA CONNECTION

CHRISTMAS 2008 EDITION

ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE:

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM KENYA	1
NEWS FROM LIGHT AND POWER.	1
A YEAR OF GROWTH AT AKIBA	2
THE PERSECUTED CHURCH	2
HEAL AFRICA	3
GOD, DEVILS, AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS	3
OBAMA MANIA	4
JUSTICE IN KENYA	4

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM KENYA



After a long plane flight and a week of zig-zagging across Nairobi, I'm now settled in a new home. It was wonderful to be back in the states for a few months and I already miss family and friends as well as some of the conveniences of Falls Church. However, I'm so grateful to be back in Kenya and am eager to continue the mission work here. My new home is more than I could have hoped for, a great apartment and perfect location on the south-east side of the city. . .There's been a lot going on

in the short time I've been back. While readjusting to life in Nairobi, I've been focused on some of our missions efforts at Church Army as well as communications work and planning for new internship programs. Recently, we said goodbye to our supervisor at Church Army who has led us with an inspiring sense of vision and a special heart for the impoverished, marginalized, and unreached. Despite three burglaries during 2008, we saw great growth and development in Church Army's mission programs and structures. The Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya is now presiding over new efforts of evangelism and we've seen the deployment of new missionaries and evangelists in Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Madagascar. Since I've been back I've also had the chance to spend time with our friends at Akiba, Light and Power, and Planting Faith, as well as a special ministry to Somali Christians. I'm excited about the year ahead and grateful for your support and for the chance to share some Christmas stories of God's work here. . .**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!!**

NEWS FROM LIGHT AND POWER

Recently, several high school graduates joined the microenterprise and mentorship programs at Light and Power Centre. All of the centre's members are now taking subsidized business and computer training classes in the evenings through Strathmore College.

The Saturday Program continues to draw many children from the community and a young

women's group has begun meeting at the Centre once a week. In addition, two new mentors have set aside well-paying jobs to live and serve full-time with Light and Power in Gatina Slum. Gabriel and Opati have brought much-needed assistance to the marketing and community development aspects of the Centre. Mean-

while, business has picked up dramatically during the holiday season. Light and Power is also hoping to open a paper-making facility soon.



Opportunities in Kenya

- Stay tuned to learn more about group Global Engagement Trips to Kenya in 2009.

CELEBRATING A YEAR OF GROWTH AT AKIBA

On Friday, November 21st, Akiba School officially closed for the 2008 school year. Students worked hard to finish their exams and have now begun enjoying a much needed Christmas break. Many students are traveling upcountry for the holiday while others remain in Nairobi with families and friends. It is a wonderful time of celebration for the school. The year 2008 saw the development of a teacher-led tutoring program, the purchase of a school bus, the development of a music department, participation and awards at National Competitions, and growth and learning



Students celebrate the arrival of the Akiba Bus.

for over four hundred students. The year also featured teaching and mentoring

from two Falls Church missionaries, Amber Bruce and Anne Stoehr, who are now back in the states continuing their studies. They are greatly missed at Akiba. Two Global Engagement Teams visited Akiba this summer and provided a face lift to the school, painting educational themes on the stone walls of classrooms.

During 2008, eighty students were sponsored by members or friends of The Falls Church. Students, parents, teachers, and the administration of Akiba School are ever grateful for this generous and kind support and for the help and hope that has been provided by The Falls Church during 2008.

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH - SOMALI CHRISTIANS IN KENYA

Sarah came in late to our meeting. She slowly removed her hijab and sat down quietly. Her son rested quietly behind her on the bench. Sarah's home had been attacked again. Thieves broke in, stealing suitcases full of clothes and two cell phones. They forced her family to lie in degrading positions and abused them verbally. The attack was orchestrated and organized by Sarah's landlord. The village chief had issued a directive that Sarah was not to be harmed during the month of November, but the order had been ignored. Sarah was previously stabbed in the chest. The week before, her daughter's leg was broken. Her son has been tortured on several occasions. All of these instances occurred for one simple reason, Sarah and her family are Christians.

There is general tolerance, social cooperation, and harmony between Muslims and Christians in Kenya. Muslims and Christians study together, play together, and work together. Political parties, social clubs, and friendships extend across religious lines. In spite of all this good will and harmony, however, there is one thing that is not allowed. It is a social and religious taboo, and the Koran forbids a Muslim to convert to Christianity. Unless the individual recants, the prescribed punishment is death.

On Wednesday afternoons I help with a service for Somali followers of Jesus. The service is held during

the middle of the week and on the opposite side of town so that no one can be accused of going to church. Somali Christians are a very small minority and face intense persecution for their faith. Many who attend the service in Nairobi have been "undercover" believers in Jesus for a long time. Some fled Somali and have been living amidst a large community of Somali refugees in Nairobi. Several who attend our service were disowned by their families and even tortured and raped for their faith. A few are recent converts (including one young man who gave his heart to Jesus Christ a few weeks ago). Two of the men who attend the service are currently homeless. Another woman has seven children and no source of income.

Each week is a desperate and faith-stretching experience. The situations and needs of these believers are so immense. I've often encountered the poverty of the slums, but this is an overwhelming and new level of destitution. Today one young woman joined us who was very sick and couldn't sit upright. When her friends took her to the hospital they learned that she was dying of starvation.

The challenges among the group of Somali believers are so huge and it seems like we

have so little to offer at the church. Each week we struggle to find enough just to reimburse bus fare for those who attend. (Some of the attendants spend all of their income on transportation just to come to church, and one of the older Somali leaders walks eight kilometers when he lacks money).

It is incredibly humbling to meet with this group each week. I am challenged and inspired by their persistent and joyful faith. Many have suffered intensely because of their relationship with Jesus Christ. After sharing her story of pain and persecution last week, Sarah closed her eyes and began to sing. Soon the whole group was singing and praising God. Afterwards, there was laughter and clapping and a time of prayer. "What else can we do?," her friend Mohammed told me. "We can only cry out and sing to God." . . . And so, Somali praise songs fill the air Wednesday afternoons as a small band of Christians in Nairobi pour out their hearts to God.

HEAL AFRICA (VISION 2015)

One of the tasks I've been helping with since I've been back in Kenya is something so huge it sometimes seems absurd. At Church Army Africa we are currently planning for Vision 2015, also known as HEAL Africa. It is the Anglican mission agency's effort to implement many of the United Nation's Millenium Development Goals by sharing the love of God through the local church. The goal is to develop over 3000 holistic churches across Eastern and Central Africa over the next several years. The hope is that each church will not only minister to individual's and communities' spiritual needs but also offer access to health care, education, economic empowerment, and social justice. It is a huge vision!

We are prayerfully starting in Kenya, and are working with Church Army evangelists and missionaries and the Anglican Church to see the establishment of 40 holistic Kenyan churches during 2009, followed by

“The goal is to develop over 3000 holistic churches. . .”

an additional initiative in Southern Sudan and then a host of other East African nations. Please be in prayer for this work. The vision is so large, but at the same time it seems almost within reach.



Members of a small church in Burundi

GOD, DEVILS, AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Recently, I was invited for a Challenge Weekend at a local public high school. Challenge Weekends are often coordinated by youth pastors as a way to reach out to boarding school students at the secondary and university levels. Most public school administrations in Kenya are strong supporters of student ministry and regularly invite religious leaders to encourage, pray for, and teach their students. The Challenge Weekend I attended had a special focus on spiritual healing and deliverance. It addressed how God brings freedom from emotional pain and addiction as well as personal sin and demonic possession.

In Kenya, the sacred and the profane are everywhere intertwined. From a perspective of western secularism, I must say

that there is a dramatically different spiritual landscape here. Buses bear scriptural verses and slogans, and business meetings often open and end with prayer. Religious education is a national curriculum (students choose to study Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism), and God is worshiped in public parks, on buses, and even in schools. Meanwhile, matatus blare gangster rap, witchcraft and the occult are quite common, poverty and disease are rampant, and oppression, corruption, and violence are found at every level of government and society. (All of which are fundamentally at odds with the basic principles of most major religions).

Kenya is a country of contrasts. Its culture



includes joyful expressions of love and acknowledgment of and experiential reliance on the divine, as well as a prevalence of curses, cults, and social and economic injustice. Hope and despair are neighbors, and hatred and love live side by side. In short, there is much that is beautiful and much that is frightening here. Kenya is a lively battleground; it's a good place to be a missionary.

During our Challenge Weekend, the whole school was challenged and many lives changed. There was a palpable sense of God's presence and many manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It left me with a renewed hope for Kenya, knowing that nothing is impossible in this land of contrasts.



OBAMA MANIA

On November 4th, many Kenyans stayed up throughout the night. Only at 7 a.m. the next day did they learn the results of the U.S. Presidential election. Obama's victory was immediately declared cause for a national holiday. Government and businesses throughout Kenya were closed on the November 6th as a nation-wide celebration ensued. In a country still mourning the catastrophe of its own elections, the victory of a son of Kenya in the U.S. produced an outpour of emotion and national pride. Bonfires, parades, and dances were held in many parts of Western Kenya as well as in the capital and along the coast. Obama posters, buttons, and

bumper stickers were on display with such enthusiasm, that one would have thought Barack was running for office in Kenya. Indeed, the newspapers here carried front page headlines for the election throughout October and early November. Within a week after the results were announced, new electrification programmes began in Obama's grandmother's district. The United States of Allego, as it is now called, has become a tourist destination and the local government aims to spruce up the region just in case Obama decides to visit.



JUSTICE IN KENYA WHAT TO DO WITH WAKI

Kenya is currently gripped in a national debate over what to do with the Waki Report. Last month, Justice Amos Waki submitted his commission's report on the post-election violence that left over one thousand people dead and three hundred thousand displaced from their homes. The report includes detailed evidence from the commission's investigation about the causes of the violence, and it names several current members of Parliament and of the National Cabinet as organizers or directors of acts of violence. The names of the accused are being held in a secret envelope that was handed over to

former U.N. Secretary General, Kofi Annan. If Kenya does not take action to prosecute the accused, the envelope will be given to the International Criminal Court so that they can be charged for crimes against humanity.

The report has left the Parliament and the country divided. Several MPs are incensed about the report and claim that it is full of hearsay and tribalism. Some are afraid the report could inaugurate a new wave of violence. They want to put the past behind

and move forward, granting some form of general amnesty to perpetrators of violence. Most Kenyans, however, are hungry for national justice and desperately want an end to the government's culture of impunity, which allows those in power to use corruption and violence for their own personal or political agendas. In the next few weeks, we'll learn more about what becomes of Waki.



PRAYER UPDATES

Please Pray:

- For Vision 2015 and Church Army's church planting efforts
- For peace, justice, and continued reconciliation and healing in Kenya
- For the persecuted Somali Christians living in Nairobi
- For a refreshing break for Akiba students and staff
- For wedding preparations and plans and for continued security and health

Give Thanks:

- For time in the U.S. and the opportunity for Lucy to meet family and friends
- For growth and for two new mentors at Light and Power Centre, Gabriel and Opati
- For a new apartment and home in South B, Nairobi

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CONTRIBUTE

I am still actively fundraising. Please consider making a year-end contribution to support this work. Checks can be made payable to "SAMS" with "Dave Chaves" in the memo line and sent to: South American Missionary Society, P.O. Box 399, Ambridge, PA 15003

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!!! MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!